Slayings Laid to Bishop

Bethesda Man 'Only Suspect' In Death of 5

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Washington Post Staff Writers

A warrant was issued last night charging missing State Department official Bradford Bishop Jr. with the murders of his wife, mother and three sons.

Maj. Wayne G. Brown of the Montgomery County Police Department said investigators have concluded that Bishop, 39, is alive and "the only suspect" in the beating deaths of his family.

Meanwhile, police in Hanover County (Wilmington), N.C. said a man looking like Bishop was seen by two detectives in a pancake house there Wednesday night. But Montgomery police were not aware of the report until informed by a reporter last night.

A waitress at the Kettle Pancake House in Wilmington told a reporter last night that she now thinks a man who was misbehaving in the restaurant about midnight Wednesday was Bishop. He ate sausage and eggs, tipped her $3 and left saying he had to "get back on the road," the waitress said.

The man had been drinking and was abusive to several blacks, two actions that do not fit Bishop's normal behavior. But both the waitress and two plainclothes detectives who were in the restaurant said that when the local paper ran Bishop's picture on Thursday that they were "pretty sure" the man was Bishop.

Several other persons in the Wilmington area reported seeing a man fitting Bishop's description the last few days.

The bodies of Bishop's family were found in a flaming grave on March 2 in Tyrrell County, N.C., about 150 miles north of Wilmington. Police said they were killed in the Bishop's home in the Carderock Springs section of Bethesda and then driven to the desolate, swampy area near Columbia, N.C., where an abortive attempt was made to burn the bodies before burying them. The fire got out of control and was discovered by a forest ranger.

The victims were not identified until last Monday, however, when Bishop's neighbors called police and reported the family missing.

Although Montgomery County police would not disclose what information led them to change the status of Bishop yesterday from missing to wanted, county police Maj. Brown said a lengthy "probable cause" was filed with District Court Commissioner John Miller, who issued the warrant.

See BISHOP, A7, Col. 1

BISHOP, From A1

Brown confirmed that a "good fingerprint" was lifted from a gasoline can recovered from the flaming pit where the five bodies were discovered in a North Carolina swamp on March 2. But he would not say if the print was Bishop's.

The major, who is director of the police department's criminal investigation division, said detectives also are investigating the use of one of Bishop's credit cards in North Carolina subsequent to the slayings.

Brown said last night he could not understand why his department had not been notified by North Carolina authorities of the reported sighting in Wilmington.

He said the closest thing to a confirmed sighting of Bishop had been on March 2, also in North Carolina, but detectives were unable to confirm that.

Despite the filing of the warrant, Brown said any talk about a motive in the bludgeon deaths would be "pure speculation."

BRADFORD BISHOP JR.
. . . sightings reported

But with the filing of the warrant, the Federal Bureau of Investigation also officially entered the case. A second federal warrant was obtained by the FBI in Baltimore last night, charging Bishop with unlawful flight to avoid prosecution.

Brown said police also have not identified or located the murder weapon, described by Dr. Page Hudson, the North Carolina medical examiner who performed the autopsies, as a "blunt instrument."

"There appears to be a poker missing from the fireplace," Brown said, but added that police do not know if that is the murder weapon.

Police also received reports of sightings of Bishop and/or the family's station wagon "as far away as Washington state," Brown said. Other reports placed Bishop in Waynesboro and Breezewood, Pa., Tampa and Jacksonville, Fla., and in North Carolina and Georgia.

Authorities also have checked airports and shipping ports along the East Coast, and Brown said police were attempting to check "foreign ports of entry."

-The Washington Post

Victims' bodies were found near Columbia, N.C.

The car is a 1974 Chevrolet Malibu station wagon bearing Maryland tags DGL-896. The color has been described variously as rust, bronze, reddish-brown and burnt orange. Brown got a sample paint chip from a local Chevrolet dealer yesterday and said the official General Motors color is called "bronze number 66." He said it is "quite different from a "bronze 76" used on current model Chevrolets.

Also missing is the family's golden retreiver, Leo.

A friend of the family reportedly was making plans to have the bodies cremated, with the ashes to be flown to California, where both Bishop and his wife grew up.

The victims were: Bishop's wife, Annette, 37; his mother, Lobelia, 68; and sons Brad III, 14, Brent, 10, and Geoffrey, 5.

As a foreign service officer with top secret clearance, Bishop has a diplomatic passport that gives him no special advantage in leaving the country but results in "certain diplomatic courtesies" upon arrival in a foreign land, according to a State Department spokesman.

Bishop's current assignment at State required him to make frequent trips abroad, and he spent considerable time in Geneva, Switzerland during two trips in the last six months.

Brown said that "while there has been some speculation that he was in the spy business, we have found nothing to indicate he was anything other than what the State Department said he was."

Bishop is a foreign service officer grade 4, with an annual salary of $25,962. His job is officially described as assistant chief of the special trade activities and commercial treaties division in the office of international trade of the bureau of economic and business affairs.

The waitress at the Kettle restaurant in Wilmington, N.C., Barbara James, 16, said she remembers the man she now believes was Bishop "because you take a good look at the troublemakers."

She said the man appearing to be about 40, wore a "bright, plaid sports coat. He was well dressed." She said he was about medium height and had dark, brown hair.

"When he came in, he grabbed my arm and gave me a $2 tip just to serve him. I could tell he had been drinking," Miss James said.

She said the man was belligerant and "cussed out" several black men sitting in a nearby booth, referring to them as "niggers" and using other abusive terms.

Miss James said she told one of the cooks that she was afraid there was going to be a fight, but then the blacks left, after telling the man to "shut his mouth."

Just before the man left, two plainclothes detectives from the sheriff's depart-

By Ken Feil—The Washington Post

Police Maj. Brown shows garden fork found at grave where bodies were discovered.

ment, Billy Lee and Billy Wiggins entered the restaurant, Miss James said.

She said the man "couldn't make up his mind" what he wanted to eat, but finally ordered sausage and eggs.

"He kept grabbing at me, and was obnoxious. He flipped his ashes on me, and in the saucer," she said.

So when the detectives arrived, she told them she was worried the man might cause trouble. By that time, he had paid his check, for $1.60, and tipped her another $1.

"He got up to go to the bathroom and said he had to 'get back on the road.' I thought he was traveling," Miss James said.

She said when Wiggins went to the men's room to check on the man, Wiggins discovered that the man had left, apparently by slipping out the back door.

Th next day, (Thursday) the officers returned to the restaurant with the newspaper picture of Bishop. "When they showed it to me, and said he was wanted for questioning about killing his family, I about fell through the floor," Miss James said. "That was him, all right."